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The Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and Auschwitz

Harvey Asher

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Vassili [Vasilii] Petrenko, *Avant et après Auschwitz* [Before and after Auschwitz], trans. François-Xavier Nérard. Paris: Flammarion, 2002. 255 pp. ISBN 2-0821-0056. fi19.00. Translation of: Vasilii Petrenko, *Do i posle Osventsima*. Moscow: Fond Kholokosta, 2000. 169 pp. ISBN 5-89897-003-7.

World Jewish Congress et al. *The Black Book: The Nazi Crimes against the Jewish People*. New York: Stratford Press, 1946. 560 pp. ISBN 0-940-1300-9.

Ilya Ehrenburg [Il'ia Erenburg] and Vasily [Vasilii] Grossman, eds. *The Black Book: The Ruthless Murder of Jews by German Fascist Invaders throughout the Temporarily Occupied Regions of the Soviet Union and in the Death Camps*, trans. John Glad and James Levine. New York: The Holocaust Library, 1981. xlv + 595 pp. ISBN 0-08960-4031-3. \$47.50. Translation of: Il'ia Erenburg and Vasilii Grossman, eds. *Chernaia kniga: O zlodeiskom povsemestnom ubiistve evreev nemetsko-fashistskimi zakhvatchikami vo vremenno-okkupirovannykh raionakh Sovetskogo Soiuz a i v lageriakh unichtozheniia Pol' shi vo vremia voiny 1941-45*. Vilnius: IAD, 1993. 578 pp. ISBN 5-899-4257-1.

Yitzhak Arad and T. Pavlova, eds. *Neizvestnaia chernaia kniga: Svidetel' stva ochevidtsev o katastrofe sovetskikh evreev, 1941-1943* [The Unknown Black Book: Eye witness Testimony on the Catastrophe of Soviet Jews, 1941-1943]. Jerusalem and Moscow: Yad Vashe m and GARF, 1993. 462 pp.

Ilja [Il'ia] Ehrenburg and Wassili [Vasilii] Grossman, eds., *Das Schwarzbuch: Der Genozid an den sowjetischen Juden* [The Black Book: The Genocide of Soviet Jews]. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994. 1149 pp. ISBN 0-7658-0691. €49.00. **[End Page 886]**

Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, eds., *Le Livre Noir: Textes et témoignages* [The Black Book: texts and testimony]. Paris: Actes Sud, 1995. 1139 pp. ISBN 2-7427-0623-2. €18.29.

Ilya [Il'ia] Ehrenburg and Vasily [Vasilii] Grossman, eds. *The Complete Black Book of Soviet Jewry*, trans. David Patterson. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002. xv + 749 pp. ISBN 0-7658-0691. \$89.50.

Between 700,000 and 3 million Jews were killed in the Nazi-occupied territories of the Soviet Union.¹ Within the prewar Soviet borders, the Nazis saw a **[End Page 887]** particular urgency in rapidly exterminating the Jews, whom they regarded as the mainstay of the Bolshevik regime. The Israeli scholar Mordecai Altshuler has studied 22 ghettos in 5 Soviet cities: in 5 of these ghettos, all the Jews were killed in an average of 23 days following the Nazi occupation; in 9 of the ghettos, within 99 days, and in 8 of them, an average of 295 days.² The primary executioners were the Einsatzgruppen, whom the notorious Commissar Order of 6 June 1941 absolved from any punishment for killing Communists, political commissars, partisans, and collaborators; Jews were included in the latter two groups. From Hitler's point of view, Bolshevism and Judaism were equivalents, since communist ideology was a Jewish weapon for seizing control of the world.

Most of the Jewish victims were machine-gunned in areas near the towns in which they had been rounded up, and some were killed in public before local spectators. Depending on time and locality, the Einsatzgruppen were aided in their grim mission by Wehrmacht units, special police units, Waffen SS brigades, and the local population, whose collaboration was most extensive in the Baltic states, Moldavia, and western Ukraine. The greatest number of executions of Soviet Jews took place from 22 June 1941 until the winter of 1941-42. From the beginning of 1943, when the tide of the war turned, until the Nazis were removed from Soviet

territory in 1944, the numbers declined, although Jews continued to be murdered even as the German army retreated.

Despite the enormous loss of Jewish lives, most Soviet accounts of the Great Patriotic War did not treat the Holocaust as a uniquely Jewish phenomenon. The plight of the Soviet Jews was portrayed as part of a larger trend: the murder by the Germans of..

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